

Good Day Distinguished Committee members of the Select Committee on Children.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to come before you today to share my experience as a foster Grand-Parent of the Department of family and Children. This has been a long and tedious journey that appears to have no end. While the Departments goal and mission is to "re-unify families". The process in which it goes through often times leads to broaden a gap within the family unit. I have had custody of my now two year old grandson since March 2010. Since that time my son (child's father) has not been allowed to come to my house to visit. The child was removed from the mother's custody months after my son and the mother were separated due to a "domestic violence issue" reported by the mother, against her. My son has not had prior to or since ever been charged with abuse of any kind against a child or youth. Yet because I have custody of his son the department will not allow him to come and visit my home while the child is there. We are also not allowed to be at family gatherings, dinner or other functions if the child is present. Where is the family reunification or preservation in that?

My personal experience with the department has been long drawn out degrading at times and down right deplorable and humiliating. While I must say that the Social worker Ms. Patrice Davis and her immediate supervisor Diane Argenta have been very supportive and helpful along with the family support intake worker who was responsible for reviewing and assessing me Ms. Ladawn Barros and her immediate supervisor Elizabeth Jimenez. While the field workers had been visiting my home and observing me with my grandson for nearly six months along with several other staff and professionals referred by the Department of Children and Family. Their recommendation to license me as a

relative foster parent was initially reviewed and I was subject to having to undergo a psychiatric evaluation at the request of Program Manager Jennifer Davis. I was sent for the evaluation because I had experienced a series of family tragedy several months prior to the placement of my grandson in my home. I had complied with every request the department asked of me and continue to do so. The psychologists that I was sent to I later found out, he had been discredited and not used any longer by two other DCF offices and the courts as well. I was misdiagnosed as being "hypo-manic" his exact words to me were "since you are not reporting that you are depressed or suicidal and you are not on any drugs, you must be hypo-manic. If you were then I could have diagnosed you as manic depressive, given the trauma you have been through. Yet you sit before me this 45 yr old girl very articulate, very personable and you express yourself extremely well. I found him and his comments both to be very offensive and off-base. The recommendation was to license me with the condition that I get medication and therapy. Due to that the department was prepared to not license me as a relative foster parent. I requested a meeting to discuss the issue with Program Manager Jennifer Davis. During the meeting with her she stated that while her staff was in support of me being licensed she sometimes over-ride their decisions. I asked her how could she ignore all of the opinions and professional assessments of her staff and other professionals and base her decision on this one person. My question to the department is, if managers do not value the professional judgment of their own field staff that has regular contact with the families, what then is the point. I was also told by the program manager that given the trauma I had endured during my life time I should have been a client of the DCF. I found this to be degrading insulting and appalling during my meeting with the program

manager. I was made to feel as if I had been the person who had neglected or abused a child which I stated to her at that time. I have never had a call, complaint or investigation on me to DCF regarding my children or any other child in my care and to be treated in such a demeaning manner was uncalled for and disrespectful. I chose to step up to the plate to look out for the well being of my grandson and to try and help repair and bridge the gap for my family.

The conclusion was that the department "was not prepared to license me at that time, however would support and recommend to a probate judge that the child remain in my custody. The department however could not offer me a stipend or any services after that point. I am a single woman on a moderate income and while I am able to support myself, would not be able to financially support my grandson in the manner in which I am doing so today. I found it very interesting that after subjecting me to a grueling intrusive process at the end the department could even consider not licensing me. Because I have the great honor to work as a legislative assistant and was aware that I could reach out to the legislators and other state and non-profit agencies for support. It caused someone in the department to review my case and the decision was made to license me with the condition that I would have a second mental health evaluation which I had requested during my meeting with the program manager. I had a second evaluation at the University of Connecticut Psychiatric Department and there was no finding of any psychological issues. I felt there was an enormous waste of State funds by having to pay for two evaluations. I also feel as if some of the services and staff that had been assigned to me at some point could have best been used for other families.

My suggestions to the department in order to engage and retain more family members would be to embrace them and partner with them. Assist family caregivers by giving them the resources needed for them to care for the children. Do not exploit their family issues, situations or tragedies in order to **save a buck**. It is my belief that some members of the department in attempts to cut back spending and to remove some children from the department's care. Found reasons not to license family members. Then would make them feel a sense of guilt if they would not keep the children in their care. I have heard of some cases even threatening to charge them with emotional abandonment. I have heard this happen over and over again strongly suspect that the same thing could've happened to me. On behalf of families who don't have a voice or resources to fight for themselves I urge you to revamp the system and preserve our families. I offer my support and would love to work with the department as a liaison for families to help fix what is broken. I thank those in the department of Children and Families who have worked diligently with me and supported me through this ongoing ordeal.